



Secretive religious charity run by top US housing officials raises questions

GJH Global Ministries, which made its website private after inquiries by the Guardian, does not appear to have a clear purpose

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One of the top officials in Donald Trump's housing department runs an opaque religious charity with a colleague who resigned from the administration when the Guardian found he was accused of fraud and exaggerated his biography.

Johnson Joy, the chief information officer at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Hud), is part of a Christian not-for-profit in Texas with Naved Jafry, who quit as a Hud adviser after inquiries about his professional history.

Until this week the group, GJH Global Ministries, invited donations on its website. But it was not clear what work the group did and its mission statements and other information appeared to be copied from those of major churches. GJH was formed in 2014 but Stephen Austin, one of its directors, said in a brief interview: "We literally did nothing."

Following inquiries by the Guardian, GJH's website was locked from public view. Other directors declined to be interviewed. The group last filed a tax return with the Internal Revenue Service for 2014. Churches and affiliated groups are not required to file annual returns.

Before being locked to visitors, one page of GJH's site showed a photograph of Joy addressing a crowd of people holding Trump campaign placards and wearing red "Make America great again" hats. Another showed Joy posing with Greg Abbott, the Republican governor of Texas. Not-for-profit organisations are barred under federal law from endorsing political candidates.

Hud did not respond to requests for comment.

Jafry declined to discuss GJH and said: "That was a long time ago." According to a filing to state regulators, Jafry became the registered agent for GJH in January this year. A one-bedroom apartment in Houston is listed as the group's headquarters.

Joy did not respond to questions about his involvement, including whether he had cited his leadership of GJH when successfully applying to work at Hud.



Johnson Joy. Photograph: HUD

Joy and Jafry both lived in the Houston area recently and attended Lakewood, the megachurch there run by the television preacher Joel Osteen. Joy worked as project manager on Osteen's cellphone app before overseeing IT at Hud - a position with a \$161,900 salary that entails managing dozens of people and a \$46m budget.

A former business partner of Jafry, Garson Silvers, said Jafry was given his job at Hud after being recommended by Osteen's mother, Dodie. Jafry disputed this. Don Iloff, a Lakewood spokesman,

said: “We don’t comment on employees or ex-employees and whether we did recommendations or not.”

Joy founded GJH and said on an ethics disclosure to a government watchdog he was its president. He and his wife remain registered with Texas authorities as two of the group’s seven directors.

Until recently, the “about us” page of GJH’s website featured a lengthy text identical to the corporate governance statement of the Hillsong megachurch in Australia. Adrienne Brown of Demoss, a public relations agency that represents the church, said: “Hillsong is not affiliated with GJH Ministries.”

A recruitment section directed visitors to a jobs portal for Gateway Church of Southlake, Texas. Lawrence Swicegood, a Gateway spokesman, said: “There is no formal business connection between Gateway Church and GJH Global Ministries.”

A page purporting to list GJH’s missions used branding and text from initiatives run by New York’s Times Square Church, which did not respond to several inquiries about whether GJH was affiliated with its initiatives.

Jafry was contracted to work as a senior adviser in Joy’s office at Hud last year. He quit after being asked about inaccuracies in his publicly stated biography and lawsuits against him for alleged frauds in Texas.

Prior to joining Hud, Joy also ran J3 Global, which was advertised as a staffing agency and consultancy. The company operated out of Joy’s home in Deer Park, Texas. J3’s website was also taken down while this article was being reported. It had featured eccentrically phrased texts relating to technology and business innovation.

One page asked visitors: “Does Your business need that ‘it’ factor? Something to push you to the next level of performance - goal achievement you desire - success you envision place where you see your business being, in your head?”

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